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## **BACKGROUND FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF NEASPEC (2021-2025)**

*Note by the Secretariat*

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## I. BACKGROUND

1. NEASPEC was established in 1993 as a follow up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992, reflecting the recognition of the needs for subregional cooperation in addressing the environmental issues, including those that are not confined to national boundaries.<sup>1</sup>
2. One key message repeatedly emphasized since its establishment is that NEASPEC should take a step-by-step approach around agreed priority areas, focusing on practical activities that would yield tangible results<sup>2</sup>, namely simple and easy-to-comprehend activities.<sup>3</sup>
3. *“Framework for the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)”*<sup>4</sup> was adopted at SOM-3 in 1996, endorsed by the 53<sup>rd</sup> Commission Session of ESCAP (ESCAP resolution 53/3),<sup>5</sup> and subsequently transmitted to the General Assembly at its 19<sup>th</sup> Special Session as substantive input outlining subregional cooperation on the environment in North-East Asia. The Framework sets out an overall operational and governance structure of NEASPEC. It reaffirms the commitment of the participating countries to promote subregional cooperation to achieve environmentally sound and sustainable development in North-East Asia through NEASPEC. It thus spells out the principal objective of NEASEPC as “to promote subregional environmental cooperation and sustainable development efforts for enhancement of quality of life and well-being of present and future generations in line with the spirit of UNCED”<sup>6</sup>. It also envisages that NEASPEC to play a key role in enhancing capacities of the participating countries in environmental management efforts through subregional cooperation.
4. *Vision Statement* for NEASPEC<sup>7</sup> was adopted at SOM-6 in 2000 and provides policy guidance to NEASPEC in the 21st Century.<sup>8</sup> The statement calls on participating countries to “promote common policy dialogue on approaches and views and coordinated actions on subregional environmental issues”. It also agreed to develop NEASPEC into a comprehensive programme for environmental cooperation in North-East Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> Para 5 SOM-1 report

<sup>2</sup> Para 13 SOM-1 report

<sup>3</sup> Para 5 SOM-1 report, etc.

<sup>4</sup> See Annex “Framework for the North-East Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation”, Report of the Third Meeting of Senior Officials on Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia, Ulaanbaatar, 17-29 September 1996, <http://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/SOM-3-Ulaanbaatar.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files//Annex%205\\_Resolution%20of%20ESCAP%20on%20NEASPEC\\_0.pdf](http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files//Annex%205_Resolution%20of%20ESCAP%20on%20NEASPEC_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See para. 3.1 of the Framework for the North-East Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation.

<sup>7</sup> Vision Statement for Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia, <http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/4.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/4.pdf>

## II. IMPLEMENTATION OF NEASPEC STRATEGIC PLAN (2016-2020)

5. The NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was adopted at the 20<sup>th</sup> Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-20) in 2015 through consultations at the SOM-19 in 2014 and a meeting of National Focal Points of NEASPEC in 2015. The NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 sets the goals, overall approaches and specific objectives and activities of NEASPEC's work in five programmatic areas identified by the member States, namely: transboundary air pollution, biodiversity and nature conservation, marine protected areas, low carbon cities, and desertification and land degradation.

6. The implementation of the strategic plan 2016-2020 has resulted in strengthening and institutionalizing various cooperation platforms launched so far, namely the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) in 2013, the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) in 2016, and the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) in 2018. In addition, the work of NEASPEC on subregional flagship species and their habitats have strengthened scientific cooperation that could support transboundary coordination among member States.

7. To assess and draw lessons from implementing the current strategic plan, evaluations have been conducted by the Secretariat and an independent external evaluator in accordance with the UN's norms and standards and in full consultation with member States.

8. On the external evaluation, member States first considered an evaluation plan at SOM-22 in 2018 and agreed at SOM-23 in 2019 to conduct the evaluation in parallel with the preparation of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan for 2021-2025<sup>9</sup>. The SOM-23 also noted the views of member States on linking the next strategic plan with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the need to forge synergies between NEASPEC and other regional and international cooperation mechanisms.

### **(1) Preliminary evaluation by the Secretariat**

9. The Secretariat shared a preliminary evaluation of implementing the current Strategic Plan at SOM-23 in 2019 for the review of member States on NEASPEC performance and initial discussions on the Strategic Plan 2021-2025<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Para 11, SOM-23 report, <http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/NEASPEC%20SOM-23%20Meeting%20Report.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [http://neaspec.org/sites/default/files//7.%20SOM23\\_New%20Strategic%20Plan\\_0.pdf](http://neaspec.org/sites/default/files//7.%20SOM23_New%20Strategic%20Plan_0.pdf)

**Table 1. Preliminary Evaluation of Implementing the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (priority programme areas)<sup>11</sup>**

Priority Programme Areas and Objectives	Planned activities	Implementation	Note
<b>Transboundary Air Pollution</b>  <b>Objectives:</b> By 2020, implement joint projects on transboundary air pollution to facilitate information sharing, joint study and cooperation among Member States and relevant institutions.	<b>Key achievement:</b> Launched the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) through studies and consultations		
	Support collaboration among national institutions on modelling on source-receptor relationship of transboundary air pollution, policy scenarios, impact assessment, etc., to strengthen the science-policy linkage	Partially	- Supported Russian institute’s capacity building on source-receptor relationship modeling - Plan to implement them under NEACAP
	Encourage the exchange of emission data to support the collaboration among scientific and academic communities	Minimally	- Challenges on methodologies and readiness - Identified as a potential priority area in NEACAP
	Promote wider participation of stakeholders in subregional cooperation on tackling air pollution	Substantially	Held various meetings and outreach to wider stakeholders
	Liaise with multilateral, regional and global mechanisms on transboundary air pollution and develop partnership activities	Substantially	Had consultations with existing mechanisms including CLARTAP, APCAP, EANET, LTP and academic networks
<b>Biodiversity and Nature Conservation</b>  <b>Objectives:</b> By 2020, implement joint plans or projects for six target species under the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy with enhanced and strengthened	<b>Key achievement:</b> Implemented projects for all target species except Snow Leopard and strengthened the scientific and policy basis of transboundary cooperation		
	Implement the strategy for habitat conservation and rehabilitation of White-naped Cranes, Hooded Cranes and Black-faced Spoonbills	Fully	Implemented two projects on the conservation and rehabilitation of habitats for the three species
	Strengthen linkages between policy framework and scientific basis, and improve harmonization of data, methods and techniques, to conserve Amur tigers and leopards	Fully	Implemented a project on the scientific assessment of transborder movement of the species which strengthened policy and scientific basis

<sup>11</sup> Updated evaluation based on the one reported by the Secretariat at SOM-23 in 2019.

transboundary cooperation among all stakeholders.	Strengthen bilateral and multilateral, and multi-level cooperation and capacity	Substantially	Conducted surveys and field researches with diverse local and international partners
	Support coordination among major stakeholders to improve existing transboundary ecological corridors and facilitate the establishment of transboundary protected areas	Substantially	Supported a joint study on the assessment of the Dauria International Protected Area (DIPA), and the process for transboundary protected area for Amur tigers and leopards
	Promote dialogue and cooperation with multilateral mechanisms	Substantially	- Played an instrumental role in DPRK's accession to the Ramsar Convention and EAAFP - Coordinated with the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on transboundary wetlands in the lower Tumen river
<b>Marine Protected Areas</b>	<b>Key achievement:</b> Supported information sharing among members and conducted an assessment		
<b>Objectives:</b> By 2020, fully operationalize NEAMPAN to support partnerships among target MPAs and stakeholders, and enhance capacity to achieve, inter alia, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets related to marine and coastal biodiversity in a holistic manner.	Facilitate the sharing and exchange of knowledge, information, experiences and practices with regard to strengthen MPA management effectiveness	Substantially	Held workshops for sharing knowledge and information, and conducted a joint study on the assessment of monitoring and management strategies
	Cooperate with existing partnerships that can provide targeted capacity-building and technical assistance	Substantially	Jointly organized activities with EAAFP and YSLME, and shared information with NOWPAP, CBD and national networks
	Enhance interactive communication among policy makers, scientific community and local stakeholders in NEASPEC	Partially	Set up the steering committee under NEAMPAN while requiring to be further activated
	Facilitate multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder communication network	Substantially	Communicated with all relevant networks and institutions at national, subregional and international levels
	Share experiences in achieving a balance between the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity	Partially	Experience sharing will be further promoted after the completion of the current study
<b>Low Carbon Cities</b>	<b>Key achievement:</b> Operationalize the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) with programmes on peer review and comparative analysis		
<b>Objectives:</b>	Facilitate information sharing and communications with regard to subregional	Substantially	Facilitated information sharing among diverse stakeholders through workshops and studies

By 2020, fully operationalize a subregional platform for low carbon cities to support communications and cooperation among stakeholders, and link cities and major stakeholders both within and beyond the subregion and promote awareness and capacity to promote low carbon and climate resilient development.	LCC progress, case studies, relevant activities, platform events and publications, etc.		
	Enhance provision of technical assistance by linking, mobilizing and connecting experts to review and analyze city's LCC approach, as well as providing recommendations and technical support	Substantially	Provided technical review and policy recommendation for host cities of the peer review, Wuhan and Guangzhou, China
	Conduct analytical studies to identify gaps, generate practical knowledge and address specific for LCC development	Substantially	Conducted a comparative study on Low Carbon City Development in China, Japan, and Republic of Korea
	Promote capacity building by matching the demand and supply of knowledge and experiences especially within the subregion to enhance local capacity	Substantially	Peer review and workshops contributed to enhancing knowledge and capacity on LCC policy
<b>Desertification and Land Degradation</b>	<b>Key achievement:</b> Launched the Study on North-East Asia Land Degradation Neutrality and Sustainable Development as part of the effort under NEAMSP		
<b>Objectives:</b> By 2020, implement a number of partnership projects recommended by the North-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Plan (NEAMSP) on Combating Desertification and Land Degradation for more coordinated and efficient actions in combating desertification amongst key stakeholders.	Map activities and capacity in the subregion to coordinate, complement and enhance efficiency of DLD-related activities	Partially	Mapped out DLDD related activities and made the information available on the NEASPE website
	Develop and maintain an open subregional network that addresses the multidisciplinary aspects and impact of DLD	Minimally	- Participated in relevant multilateral and international platforms in North-East Asia - Overlap of national focal points and partners with the DLDD-NEAN
	Build partnerships, joint activities, and mobilize financial and technical resources for NEAMSP as appropriate	Minimally	- Organized consultation meeting with DLDD-NEAN to explore possible synergies - Built a new partnership with FAO by co-organizing a side event at the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week 2019
	Enhance regional cooperation for best practice sharing and upscaling integrated land rehabilitation to improve sustainable land management decision making	Substantially	Contributed to publication of the UNCCD subregional Thematic Report on LDN

10. The levels of achievements in each thematic area are as follow:

- **Air pollution:** Institutionalized the subregional efforts on addressing air pollution issues through the establishment of the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) in 2018. NEACAP will facilitate information and data exchange, coordinate with relevant mechanisms and synthesizes their results, and propose potential technical and policy measures. Member governments designated national experts to the Science and Policy Committee (SPC) as the steering body of NEACAP as well as research institutes as NEACAP Technical Centers to support the technical work of NEACAP.
- **Biodiversity:** Took an integrated ecosystem approach to the conservation of subregional flagship species and their habitats through advancing scientific cooperation and providing science-based policy recommendations towards institutionalizing the transboundary conservation among member States, including to support the establishment and expansion of transboundary protected areas located along or near the national boundaries, and to coordinate the management plans of critical habitats.
- **Marine protected areas:** Operationalized the North-East Asia Marine Protected Area Network (NEAMPAN) with the Steering Committee consisting of the members nominated by the member States participating in the programme. Conducted workshops for information sharing among managers of the MPAs, experts and stakeholders, and carried out a joint study on the sustainable management of MPAs, which will serve as a key reference for NEAMPAN work.
- **Low carbon cities:** Operationalized the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) by engaging local government officials, experts and regional networks for exchanging experiences and views in pursuing low carbon city development. Highlighted various challenges and approaches in promoting low carbon city development through in-depth studies and peer review workshops. Made conscious efforts to explore synergies with similar initiatives undertaken in the subregion such as the research project initiated under auspices of Tripartite Environmental Ministers Meeting (TEMM).
- **Desertification and land degradation:** Facilitated various outreach activities with stakeholders to build partnerships and complementarities, and share subregional experiences on innovative financing and multistakeholder engagement in connection with the North-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Plan (NEAMSP). Collaborated with the DLDD-NEAN and UNCCD Secretariat and provided substantive inputs for the Global Land Outlook Northeast Asia Thematic Report.

## (2) Stakeholder survey

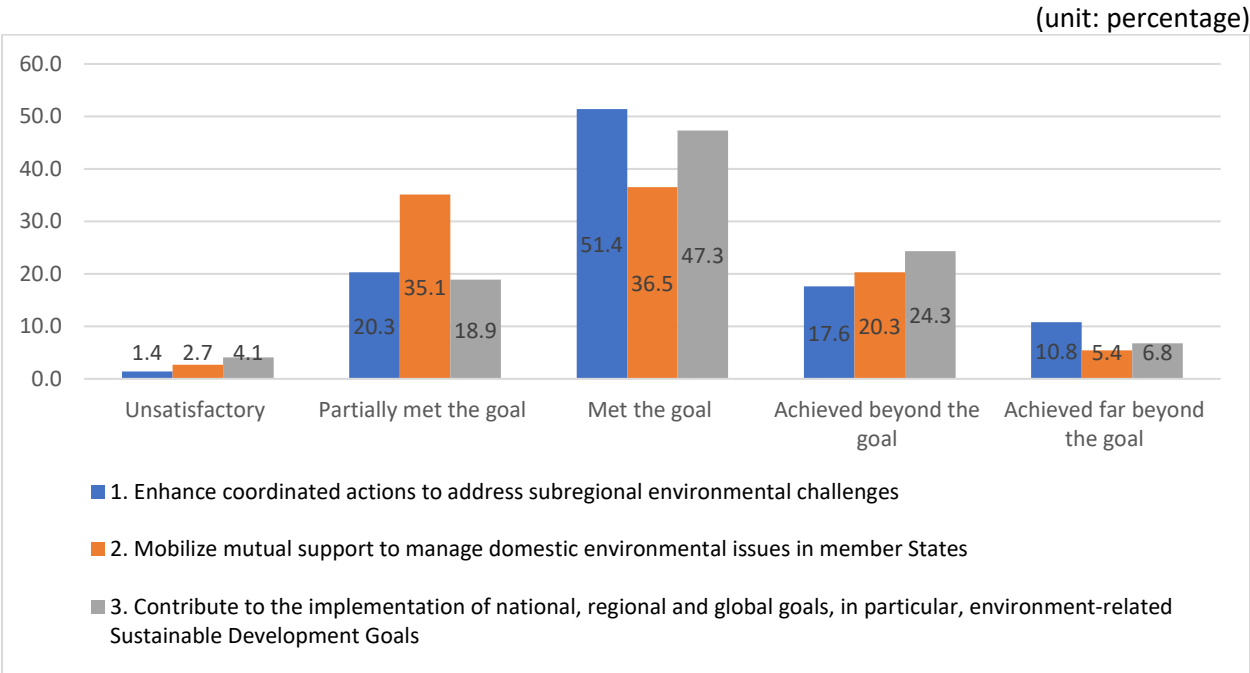
11. As a part of evaluation as well as inputs for preparation of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, the Secretariat conducted a stakeholder survey in March-April 2020 involving a wide range of

stakeholders including national focal points of NEASPEC, project partners, experts and former personnel. The survey received feedbacks on the implementation of the current strategic plan and suggestions for the future work. The survey collected data from 163 respondents and the full report is attached as Annex.

*Achievements and challenges*

12. On the NEASPEC’s performance in delivering its current strategic goals (Figure 1), majority of the respondents rated NEASPEC achieved the goals respectively on “enhancing coordinated actions to address subregional environmental challenges”, and “contributing to the implementation of national, regional and global goals, in particular, environment-related Sustainable Development Goals”. The performance on the goal of “mobilizing mutual support to management domestic environmental issues in member States” is comparatively lower.

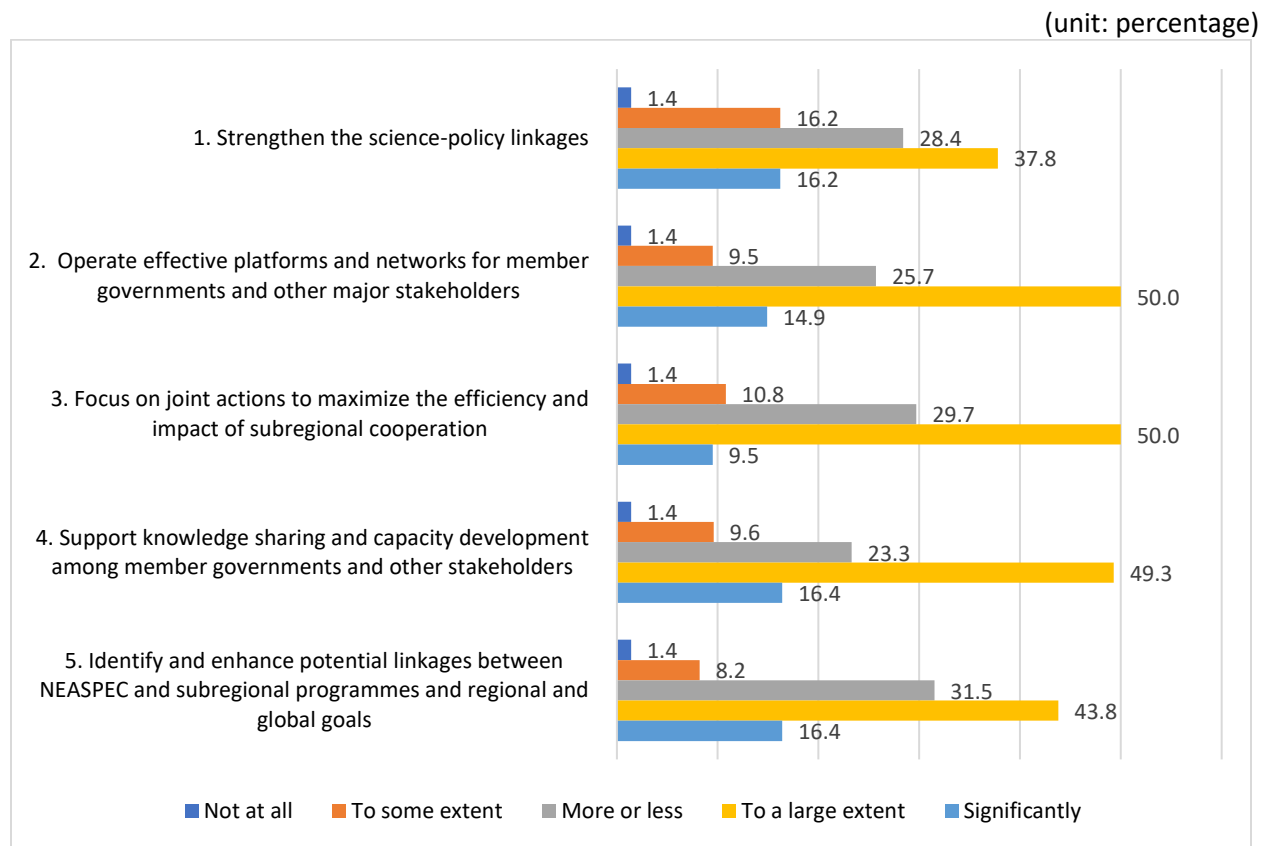
**Figure 1. Stakeholder response on NEASPEC’s performance against the goals in the Strategic Plan**



13. Most respondents viewed that the current approaches are to certain extend effective and successful in achieving the goals (Figure 2).

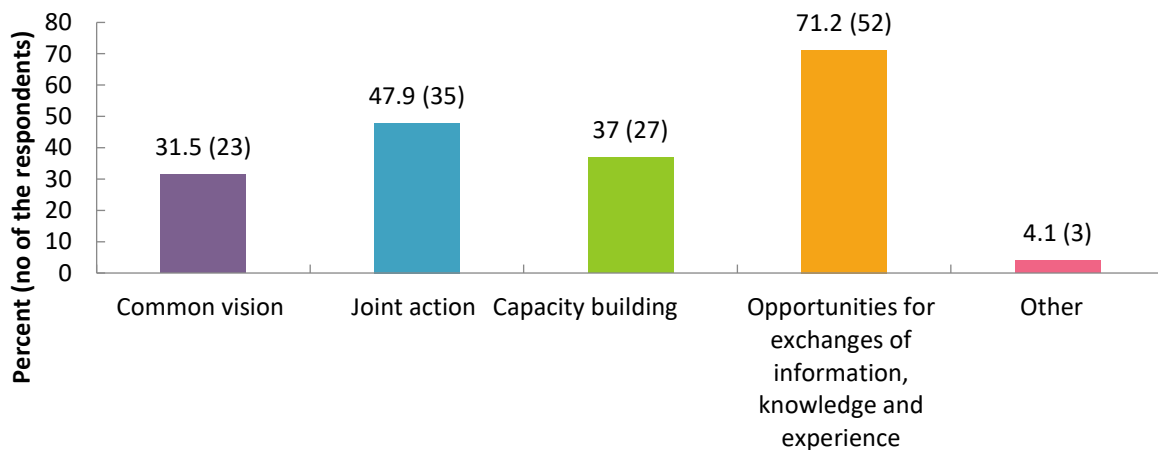


**Figure 2. Effectiveness of the current approaches of NEASPEC in achieving its Strategic Goals**

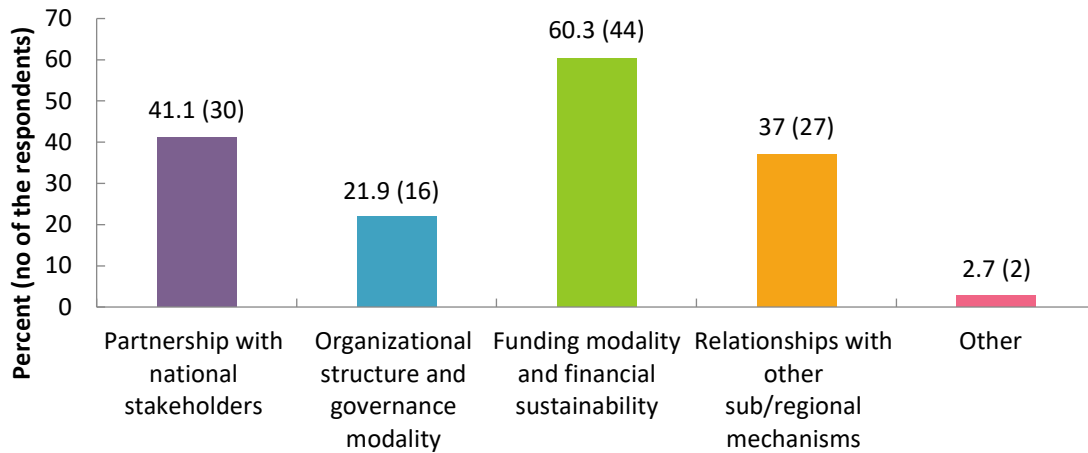


14. Whilst most respondents considered the “opportunities for exchanges of information, knowledge and experience” as the most important achievement of NEASPEC (Figure 3), “funding modality and financial sustainability” and “partnership with national stakeholders” were identified as the top challenges/ constrains faced by NEASPEC (Figure 4).

**Figure 3. Most important achievements of NEASPEC**



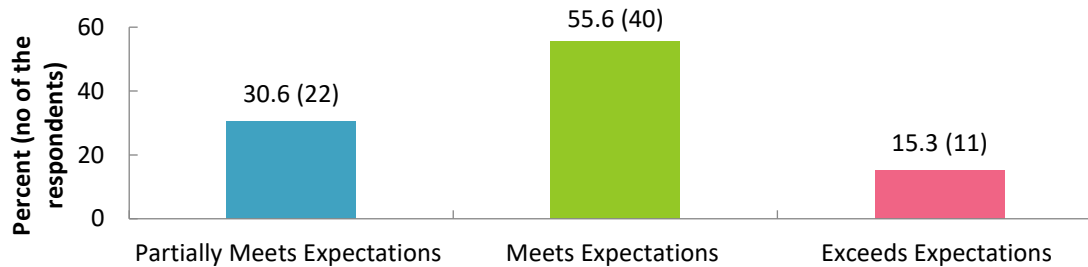
**Figure 4. Critical challenge/ constrains faced by NEASPEC**



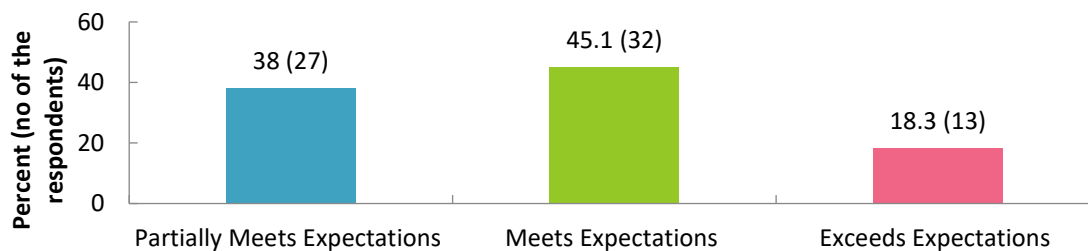
*Relevance*

15. Over half of the respondents considered that the NEASPEC framework is relevant to the needs and priorities related to environmental cooperation across the member countries (Figure 5), and slightly less believed that NEASPEC has fulfilled its mandate of supporting environmental cooperation in the subregion (Figure 6).

**Figure 5. Relevance of NEASPEC to the needs and priorities related to environmental cooperation across the member countries and East and North-East Asia**



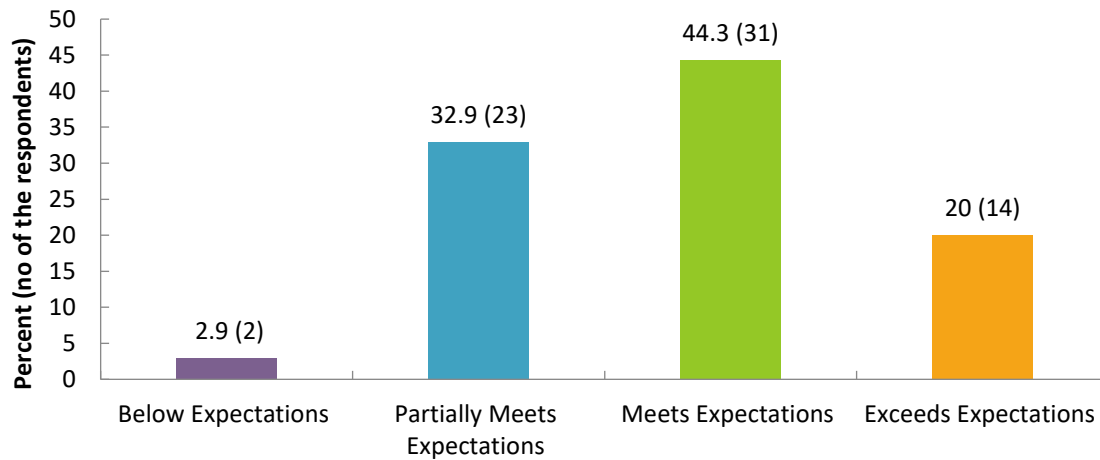
**Figure 6. NEASPEC’s fulfillment of its mandate of supporting environmental cooperation in the subregion**



*Effectiveness and efficiency*

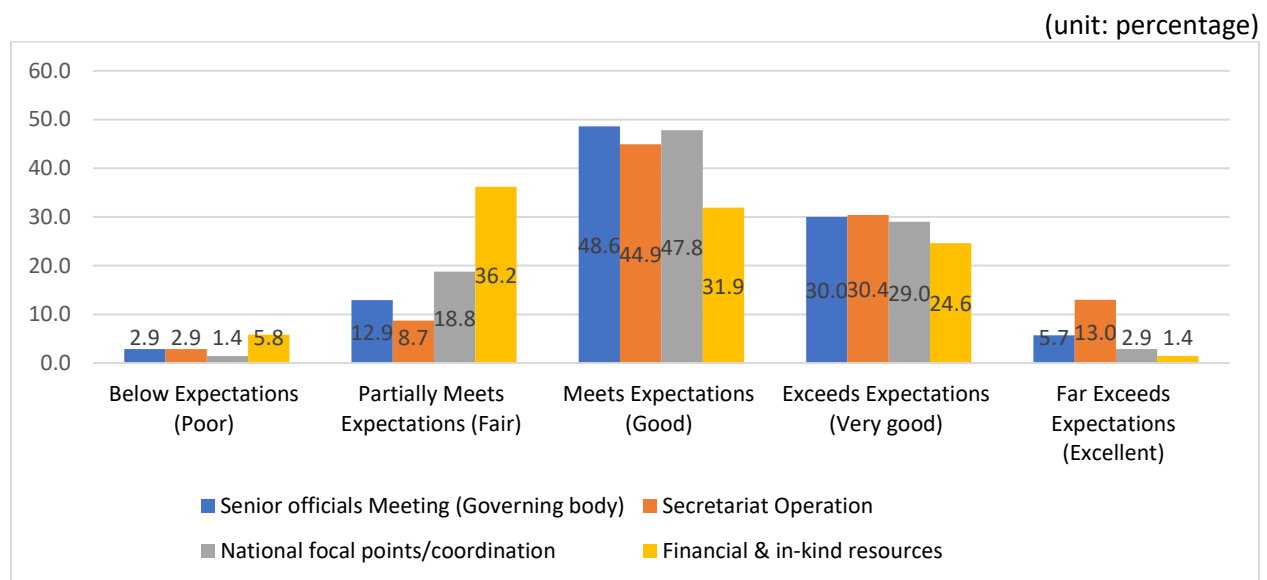
16. More than half of the respondents believe that NEASPEC has provided an effective platform and built up networks for member governments and other major stakeholders to enhance environmental cooperation (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Effectiveness of NEASPEC in building networks for member governments and other major stakeholders to enhance environmental cooperation**



17. On the institutional arrangements and delivery of financial (including in-kind) resources, while most survey participants believe the operation of the Senior Officials Meeting, the secretariat operation, and the coordination with national focal points met the expectations, the level of satisfaction on the financial and in-kind resources of NEASPEC was slightly lower. The secretariat operation received a relatively high level of satisfaction (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Institutional arrangements and financial resources of NEASPEC for the effective delivery of the current strategy plan**



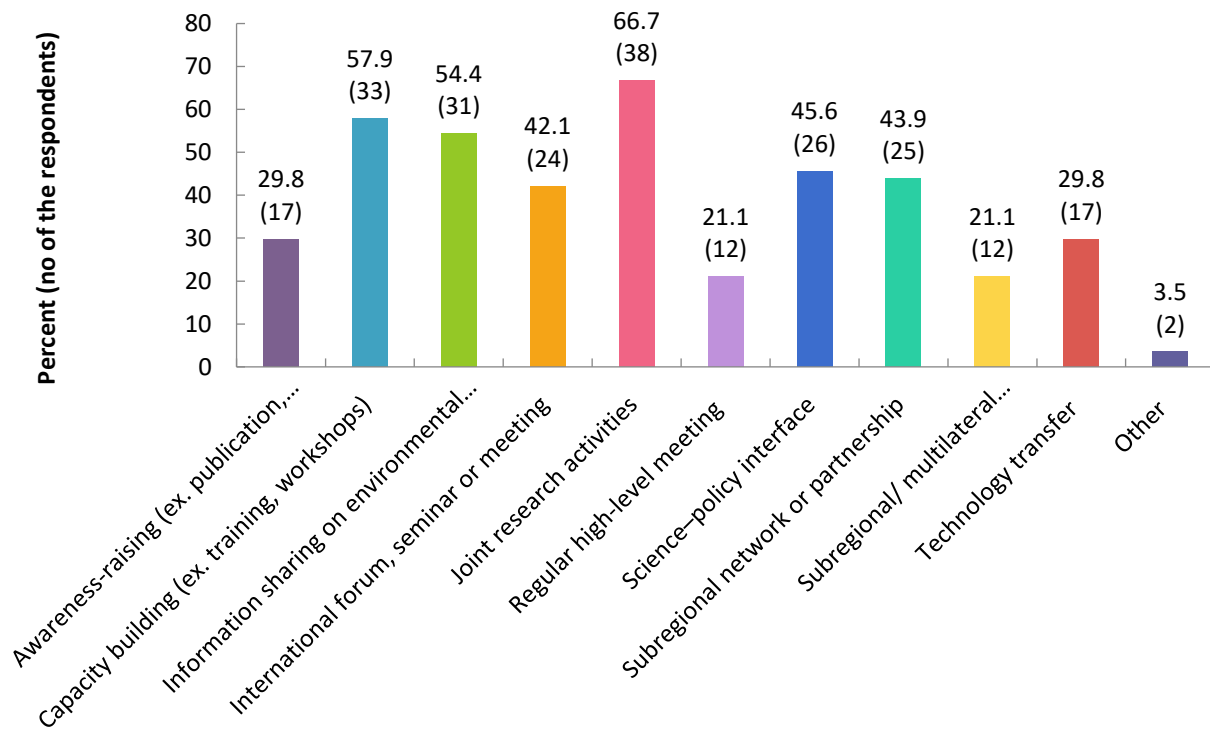
18. On improving the effectiveness and efficiency of NEASPEC for addressing environmental priorities in North-East Asia and enhancing its linkages with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, suggestions are categorized as follow (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Suggestions on improving the effectiveness and efficiency**



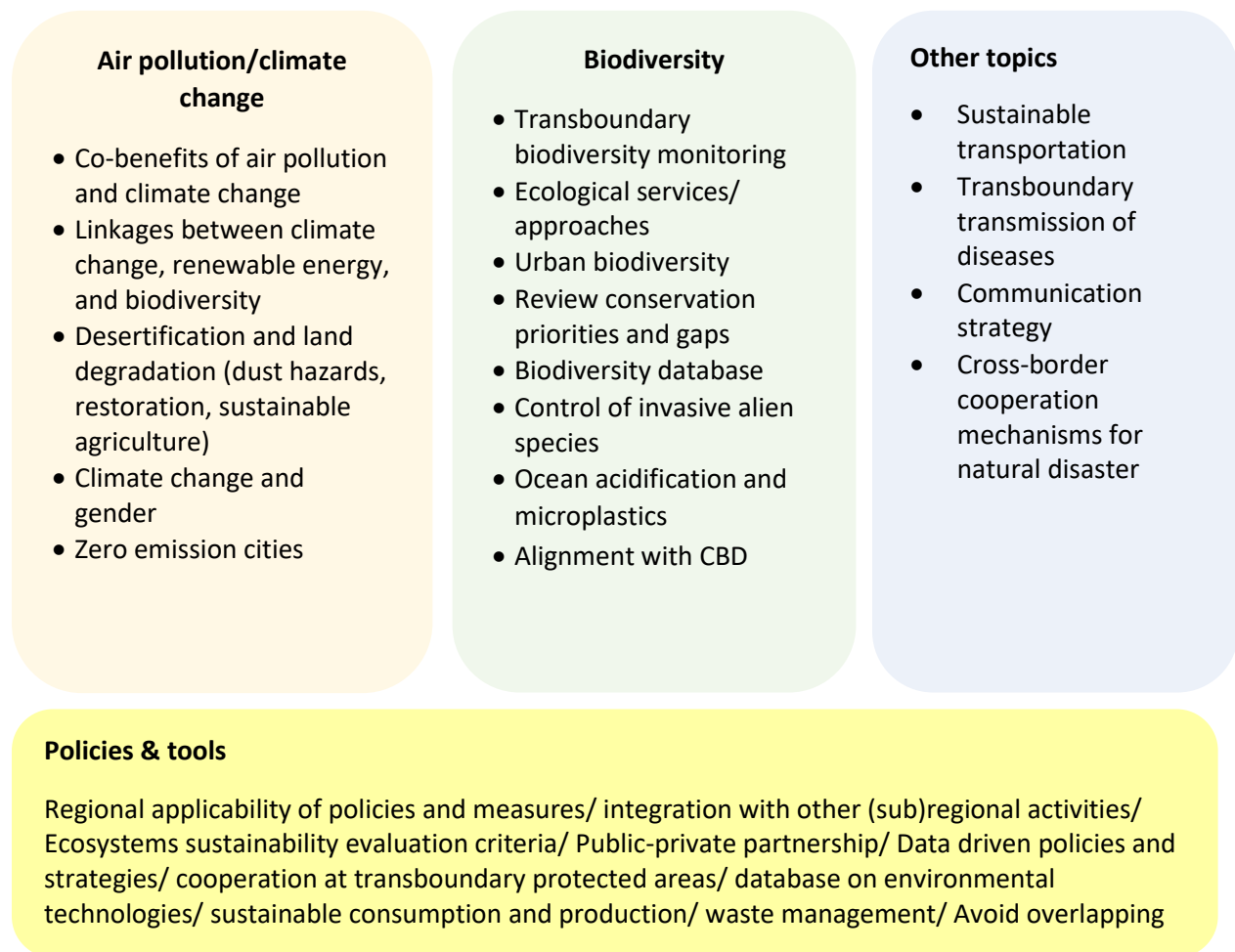
19. On the modalities, most respondents rated joint research activities, capacity building (e.g. training and workshops), and information sharing on environmental policies and regulations to be further strengthened to effectively respond to the subregional needs (Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Type(s) of actions should be further strengthened**



20. The following new issues were suggested on to be addressed by the new strategic framework 2021-2025 (Figure 11).

**Figure 11. New issues suggested under strategic plan 2021-2025**



21. The following overarching goals and global/ regional programme were suggested for the new strategic plan (Figure 12). To achieve these suggested goals, the survey also captures the type of activities and key actors suggested to be involved (see results of Question 16 and 17 in the Annex).

**Figure 12. Overarching goal and relevant global/ regional programmes suggested for the next strategic plan**

- Contribute as much as we can to the SDGs as an **overarching goal**
- **Linkage with SDGs:** select a few SDGs (e.g. 11, 6) to link

**Air pollution**

Address the various gaps in experts and research infrastructure among countries for future collaboration

**Climate Change**

- Align NEALCCP with net-zero campaigns around the world
- Zero emissions vision
- Low-carbon society and economy

**Synergies**

- Promote synergies between DLD and other sectors (climate change, clean/ renewable energy, and biodiversity)
- Restoration of degraded land aligned with climate adaption
- Work organically with other existing efforts such as UNCCD’s DLDD-NEAN (eliminate duplication)
- Enhance coordination and synergies with EAAFP, Global Tiger Initiative, international climate

**Biodiversity**

- Promote the post-2020 global biodiversity targets
- Migratory bird connectivity (arid land and water issues)
- Promote Yellow Sea Ecoregion conservation initiatives, EAAFP, and world heritage nomination
- Ecosystem-based approaches (protocols, technical guidelines and models) and migratory species as index of connection
- Ensure the migratory safety of globally threatened bird species and enhance the habitat resilience (esp. anthropogenic habitats)
- Enlarge monitoring area of Amur tiger and leopard
- Promote common vision and implementation for big cat corridors
- Biodiversity database
- Broaden current topic areas to reflect new and upcoming vision and targets to be adopted at CBD COP15
- Coexistence and co-prosperity of nature and society

**Land degradation**

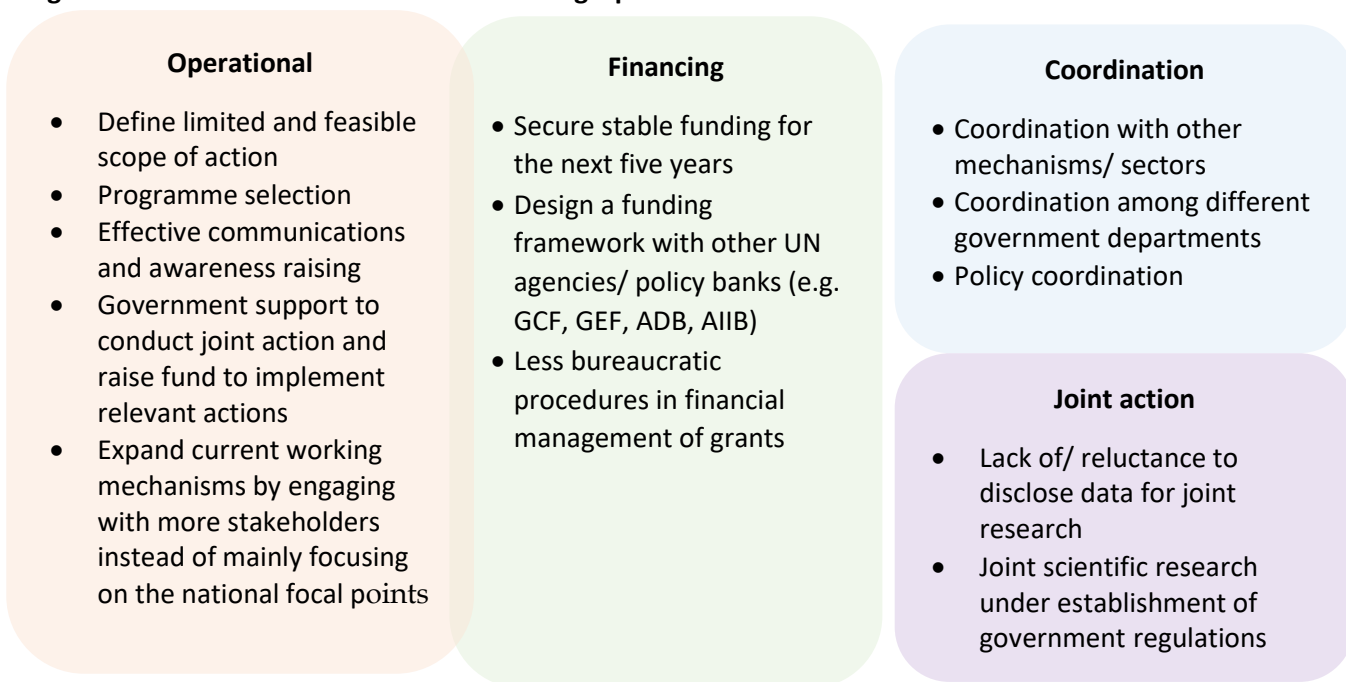
- Reduction of land degradation (SDG15.3.1)
- Coordination mechanism, regional applicability and sustainability of DLD mitigation with integrated measures
- Establish a multilateral cooperation mechanism to prevent grassland degradation and desertification
- Conduct joint research on relevant control technology and policies
- Carry out training and demonstration the application of results
- Identify new research topics based on the result of restoration effect assessment
- Increase resilience of local communities to dust and sandstorm (improve agriculture technology and promote organic farming)

**Others**

- Apply big data for an open data platform to promote data-driven policy
- Resource mobilization
- 4<sup>th</sup> individual revolution and smart city
- Establish a multilateral cooperation system that can monitor and respond to natural disasters and social issues

22. The survey also identified the following obstacles anticipated by the respondents that need to be addressed in the next strategic plan: funding security, effective communications, lack of data, implementing actual projects, government support, joint scientific research, and policy coordination (Figure 13).

**Figure 13. Obstacles identified for new strategic plan**



### (3) External evaluation and preliminary conclusion

23. Following to the discussion at SOM-23 and overseen by an Evaluation Reference Group chaired by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, an independent external consultant was hired to conduct an evaluation from April to July 2020 to generate the lessons learnt and recommendations for developing the future strategy of NEASPEC.

#### *Relevance*

24. The external evaluation preliminarily concluded that the informants representing the breadth of stakeholder groups affirm that NEASPEC is relevant and it has a vital role in fostering subregional cooperation. The informants contend that the most important achievements of NEASPEC relate to providing opportunities for exchange of information, knowledge, and experience. Noting the challenge of achieving consensus among all member States, NEASPEC was perceived to have been able to moderate impasses and enabled breakthrough on inter-governmental cooperation.

25. While stakeholders have reported that they are generally satisfied with NEASPEC's relevance, survey and interview data point to an opportunity to improve. It is suggested that NEASPEC's work could be more strategic, based on the leadership its member States has taken in pushing the regional environmental agenda forward. The establishment of the North-East



Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) demonstrates that NEASPEC can be a source of direction for the wider Asia-Pacific region and potentially the UN community at large.

26. As member States have a broad range of initiatives, programmes, and platforms, there is the concern about duplication, and it is suggested that stronger steering is needed for NEASPEC to be more effective and strategic, shifting beyond its current level of ambition with respect to knowledge exchange. The evaluation further indicates that the stronger steering can be generated from enhancing the NEASPEC Secretariat, substantive support through ESCAP, and clarity of common vision and ownership of member States.

27. On country ownership, the current level of ownership by member States does not appear to be sufficient to enable NEASPEC to rise to its potential for performing as a strategic instrument, providing that the participation in Senior Official Meetings of government officials with insufficiently high-level of decision-making power and too high turnover of participants.

### *Efficiency*

28. Using Efficiency as an assessment criterion is not necessarily pertinent, given NEASPEC's main objective is related to pursuing inter-governmental cooperation. By its very nature, such a platform does not lend itself to efficiency and imposing an efficiency regime would defeat NEASPEC's purpose and undermine the strength of the processes set up to allow pursuit of inter-governmental cooperation. Such a process and its rhythm privileges political considerations over efficiency.

### *Sustainability*

29. The nature of NEASPEC's financial sustainability needs to be more precisely characterised and positioned as there is contradictory evidence on the financing of the mechanisms as an actual issue. It is suggested to align the criteria on project selection among member States and ESCAP to address the financial sustainability issue.

### *Effectiveness*

30. NEASPEC is operating as a generator of ideas and testing ground for intergovernmental environmental cooperation whereby mutual understanding on ways and areas to cooperate is developed through substantive collaboration. While NEASPEC has tangibly demonstrated its ability to advance the agenda on improving regional air quality, its potential has not been sufficiently leveraged to date.

31. The achievements on NEACAP, albeit requiring quite some time, have demonstrated NEASPEC's ability to foreground an issue, build momentum through substantive action, and generate directions for action that can be expanded to wider Asia Pacific region through ESCAP. However, such dynamic between NEASPEC and ESCAP has not been sufficiently exploited to advance the regional environmental agenda. It is suggested for NEASPEC to take up calls to action emerged through ESCAP, and NEASPEC's member States to take leadership through their multilateral action and pull other Asia Pacific countries to drive agenda forward.

32. There has been a trend of localizing the implementation of programmatic activities evolved during the current Strategic Plan (2016-2020) following a global trend of moving actions down to the local level to focus on real implementation. In the absence of more strategic steering, NEASPEC could evolve towards a situation where each thematic area is working with its own approach, and if it continues to move in this direction, significantly more capacity would be needed in the NEASPEC Secretariat.

33. There is a need to improve the alignment of and communication on NEASPEC as an intergovernmental platform. It is suggested to review the current thematic areas to ascertain their fit for the NEASPEC agenda.

#### *Institutional and organizational arrangements*

34. Member States conceive of and refer to NEASPEC as an institutional mechanism, platform, and framework that facilitates intergovernmental environmental cooperation, rather than perceiving this as an ESCAP programme. Messages and communications from NEASPEC Secretariat about needing to fit ideas for pursuing intergovernmental cooperation into an ESCAP Project Document following ESCAP's procedures, de-energize stakeholders and does not achieve the leverage that is anticipated. For member States, the NEASPEC mechanism is more about the cooperation rather than having the type of fixed end objectives which defines a programme and project.

#### *Recommendations for positioning the next Strategic Plan*

35. For the next five years, the focus needs to be on developing better recognition and understanding of what NEASPEC actually is and getting more leverage out of this instrument. A shared understanding is needed at all levels of NEASPEC, its member States and project partners, and within ESCAP. This implies a more strategic approach is needed and it will require more steering and more resourcing.

### **III. PARTNERSHIP WITH RELEVANT MECHANISMS**

36. Member states highlighted at SOMs to create synergies; distinction between thematic areas and focus areas when assessing whether there is any duplication. The secretariat has collaborated with the mechanisms as follows (Table 2).

**Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP):** The Secretariat maintained communication with NOWPAP, to explore area of collaboration and avoid duplication, while no joint activities have taken place so far as NEAMPAN activities focus on people to people communication and network in area-based management while NOWPAP focuses on technical issues of marine areas beyond protected areas.

**Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME):** The Secretariat kept close communication with the project management office of YSLME, to constantly explore the areas of potential collaboration in areas concerning the protected areas of Yellow Sea.

**Northeast Asia Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Network (DLDD-NEAN):** The Secretariat had a series of consultations with the DLDD-NEAN on the possible re-focusing and establishing synergies and provided substantive inputs to the Global Land Outlook: Northeast Asia Thematic Report.

**Joint Research Project on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollutants in North-East Asia (LTP):** The Secretariat has been invited to its annual Expert Meeting that focuses on sharing the outcomes of modeling and monitoring of transboundary air pollution conducted by experts in China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The Secretariat has also updated the progress and plan of NEACAP.

**Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET):** The Secretariat maintained close communication with the EANET Secretariat to update progress in each mechanism and share views on programmes and institutional settings. However, the scope of each mechanism and the current process of NEACAP have limited substantive cooperation.

**Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) among Japan, Republic of Korea and China:** The Secretariat has consulted with the host governments of the annual TEMM to attend as an observer for the meeting or obtain an observer status. However, it was not possible to secure such opportunity. Meanwhile, the Secretariat built synergies with TEMM research project on low carbon city policies by collaborating its research team, institutes of the three TEMM countries, on a NEASPEC study. Most recent discussions on the NEACAP workplan also looked at the possibility of linking NEACAP's policy dialogue with TEMM's Tripartite Policy Dialogue on Air Pollution.

**Table 2. Environment related mechanisms in North-East Asia and their focus areas**

Mechanisms	Members	Governance	Secretariat	Specific Focus Areas
NEASPEC	All 6 countries	Senior Officials Meeting	ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office	Air pollution, terrestrial and marine biodiversity, low carbon city, land degradation
TEMM	China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (CJK)	Ministers' Meeting	Host ministry of annual meeting	Air quality, 3R/circular economy, climate change, Biodiversity, chemical management, environmental education, etc.
NOWPAP	CJK, Russia	Intergovernmental Meeting	Secretariat under the auspices of UNEP	Coastal management, pollution prevention, marine biodiversity
YSLME	China, ROK	(Intergovernmental project)	Project management office under	Fish stock recovery, sustainable mariculture, habitat conservation,

			auspices of UNOPS and inter-Ministry coordinating committee	monitoring and assessment, pollution reduction, good governance
EANET	CJK, MNG, Russia and South-East Asia	Intergovernmental meeting	UNEP Regional Office for Asia-Pacific	Acid deposition monitoring, research, and capacity building
LTP	CJK	Expert meeting	ROK National Institute for Environmental Research	Modeling and monitoring of transboundary air pollution
EABRN	All six countries and Kazakhstan	Network meeting	UNESCO Beijing Office	Research and capacity building on biosphere reserve management
DLDD-NEAN	China, Mongolia, ROK	Steering committee meeting	Korea Forest Service of ROK	Subregional implementation platform for achieving land degradation neutrality target (LDN) and enhancing the implementation of UNCCD

#### IV. THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT OF THE NEASPEC STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

37. The recent achievements of institutionalizing subregional environmental cooperation under NEASPEC have inspired actions at a broader level. For example, ESCAP member States adopted the Resolution 75/4 on “Strengthening regional cooperation to tackle air pollution challenges in Asia and the Pacific”<sup>12</sup> in 2019, appreciating the efforts of NEASPEC member States to combat air pollution through the launch of the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP). The resolution invites ESCAP member States to share their experiences of subregional and regional cooperation on various intergovernmental programmes in the region concerning air pollution, and to strengthen efforts to foster sustainable and environmentally sound development towards ecological sustainability and cooperation on, and the transfer of, environmentally sound technologies to tackle air pollution challenges.

38. Recognizing the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources and its role to promote sustainable development, ESCAP member States adopted the Resolution 76/1 on “Strengthening cooperation to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”<sup>13</sup> in 2020. The resolution, among others, calls on governments and stakeholders of member States

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/commission/75/document/E75\\_Res4E.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/commission/75/document/E75_Res4E.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/commission/76/document/RES\\_76\\_1\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/commission/76/document/RES_76_1_ENG.pdf)

to take urgent action for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources and share good practices and lessons learned.

39. Under the Paris Agreement, each party shall communicate, at five-year intervals, successively more ambitious NDCs. By 2020, parties whose nationally determined contributions (NDCs) contain a time frame up to 2025 are requested to communicate a new NDC and parties with an NDC time frame up to 2030 are requested to communicate or update these contributions. Furthermore, all parties are expected to formulate and communicate on their respective “long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (LEDS)” by 2020 pursuant to the Paris Agreement (Article 4.19) and in light of different national circumstances.<sup>14</sup> The goals and actions identified in new NDCs and LEDS could provide areas of subregional cooperation.

40. On marine environment protection, there is increasing awareness on the impacts of human activities on the marine ecosystems. The declaration entitled “Our ocean, our future: call for action”, which was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/312 in 2017, calls on all stakeholders to conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and to take action, among others, to “Support the use of effective and appropriate area based management tools, including marine protected areas... to enhance ocean resilience and better conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity”.

41. Given the challenges on climate change and biodiversity degradation are interlinked, there are growing discussions on applying nature-based solutions that provide an opportunity to unlock the potential of nature in climate action and biodiversity conservation. Nature-based solutions in NDCs and long-term, low-GHG emissions development strategies (LEDS) contribute to raising the level of ambition and concrete actions to protect nature, and to better fight climate change. Moreover, nature-based solutions or also referred to as ecosystem-based approaches have been discussed as part of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Specific goals and targets related to the nature-based solutions, such as contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and disasters risk reduction, are being discussed in the CBD process for possible adoption at COP15 in 2021.

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<sup>14</sup> The COP, by its decision 1/CP 21, paragraph 35, invited Parties to communicate, by 2020, to the secretariat mid-century, long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies in accordance with Article 4, paragraph 19, of the Paris Agreement. See <https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/long-term-strategies>.